

been assaulted by their partners, however, the violence continues to be a paramount issue in deciding what custody and access arrangement they feel will best meet their children's needs.

As the Committee heard from witnesses, sexual assault and other forms of violence against mothers and children have a tremendous impact on the well-being of children. The Committee was told of evidence suggesting that children who see wife assault and child abuse are likely to grow up to be batterers, if they are male, or battered, if female, as a result of exposure to violence within their own homes. The Committee is concerned that this pattern not continue. Men who batter their wives or children should not be afforded the same rights to custody of and access to their children as men who are not violent.

RECOMMENDATION 22

The Committee recommends that the *Divorce Act* be amended to ensure that violence against women or children, including wife assault, sexual abuse and sexual assault, are factors to be considered in the determination of the custody of and access to children.

P. GUN CONTROL

The Committee has explored the many dimensions of violence against women, including gun-related crimes against women. Women are more often victims than perpetrators of attacks with guns. The Committee was told that access to guns is a major public health hazard. Witnesses indicated that 80% of Canadians want tougher gun control laws. The costs of permitting the presence of guns in our society were also highlighted in statistics provided by Wendy Cukier, of Canadians for Gun Control. In 1987, 1,300 people were killed with guns in Canada; of these deaths, 200 were homicides, 22 accidental shootings, and over 1,000 were suicides. In addition, about 1,300 people were injured with guns. Firearms are used in over 30% of homicides in Canada (11:11-13).

Women are one-third of all firearms homicide victims. Women, on the other hand, are only 5% of the perpetrators of these crimes. These facts make the issue of gun control particularly germane to the study of violence against women, and legislative responses to it. It is apparent to this Committee that the presence of guns in our homes and communities puts women and children at risk.